

Council bill would give Leggett power to OK speed camera locations

State law could cut county program's revenue in half

by Erin Cunningham | Staff Writer

Montgomery County expects to lose more than \$12 million in speed camera revenue this fiscal year, because it must comply with a state law that places additional restrictions on the camera program that has operated in the county since 2007.

The Montgomery County Council introduced a bill Tuesday that would make the county's law comply with some parts of the state law, which passed in 2009.

Under the bill, County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) could authorize the county police department to deploy cameras at sites where they were not in operation before Oct. 1, 2009 — when the state law went into effect.

Under the law, the approval of a governing body is needed to authorize new locations.

A public hearing has been scheduled for March 23 on the bill.

The cameras can be placed in school zones and on a highway in a residential district with a speed limit of up to 35 mph.

Currently, 119 sites in Montgomery County are designated for speed cameras. Of those locations, 60 have fixed permanent cameras, and the other 59 are occasionally monitored by six vans equipped with speed cameras. Tickets are \$40, but additional fees are assessed for late payments.

Under the 2006 law, speeding tickets were issued to those driving 11 mph or more over the speed limit. However, a change the new state law has pushed the threshold to 12 mph.

The more recent law also restricted the hours in which cameras in school zones can operate to between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. Previously, those cameras could ticket drivers at any time.

Montgomery County had expected to receive about \$29.3 million in speed camera revenue in fiscal 2010, which ends June 30.

However, because of changes in the state law, which took effect just three months into the current fiscal year, county spokesman Patrick Lacefield said officials estimate the county will receive about \$17.2 million.

The estimates for fiscal 2011 are not yet known, he said.

Montgomery County Councilman Philip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg said Monday that the bill being considered by the council will make the speed camera program more efficient.

Without transferring approval powers to Leggett, the council will have to vote on every camera location.

Andrews, who chairs the council's Public Safety Committee, said there could be a need for additional "justified locations" for speed cameras. However, a camera could simply be moved to a different street where speeding is a concern, he said.

More cameras might not be needed, he said.

"I would think there are still locations where speeding is a serious public safety problem," Andrews said.